



COMMUNITY RELATIONS BOARD  
2008-2009 ANNUAL REPORT  
(Pursuant to City Code Section 2-890)

*Mission Statement: To foster mutual understanding and tolerance amongst all ethnic groups within the City of Miami.*

The City of Miami Community Relations Board (CRB) was established in 1999 by Ordinance (No.11742) and is committed to finding ways to foster mutual understanding, tolerance, and respect among all economic, social, religious, and ethnic groups within the City of Miami.

The CRB serves in an advisory capacity to the City Commission and has the responsibility to recommend and provide educational and social programs, designed to eliminate discrimination in any form and to improve community relations by enlisting the support of civic leaders and citizen. The board consists of 13 members who are representative of the social, racial, religious, linguistic, gender, cultural, and economic characteristics of this city. Administrative support for the CRB is provided by the City Manager's staff and its liaison. The board meets monthly to review and discuss issues affecting our community's ability to work, play, learn, celebrate and engage in governance with good will toward our fellow residents.

Responses to the following questions are as follows:

**1. Has the board served the purpose which it was created?**

Yes, the CRB has-continued its partnerships with community groups in all parts of the City, including the Overtown Community Oversight Board and the Miami Dade CRB Immigration Advocacy and LBGT Committees to work for reduced community tensions. Further, the CRB has again included juniors from our public high schools as members. The CRB facilitated the presentation to the community of a special State Attorney's Office (SAO) program called Menace to Society. This year a wide and deep net of police activity in Overtown resulted in the arrests of numerous multiple-arrest individuals who threaten the well being and quality of life of the Overtown residents. The Menace to Society program is designed to elicit community support, working with the Miami Police and SAO staff, in hopes that the arrested individuals will receive longer sentences upon conviction or plea.

The CRB established a library in partnership with Hands on Miami and Books and Books bookstore for the pre-schoolers of the Liberty Square area. We contributed labor, supplies such as bookshelves and a reading chair and several hundred books focused on themes of tolerance and inter-group relations.

Building on last year's relationship with the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), the CRB worked on scheduling additional workshops in the public high schools and made arrangements for the Miami Parks pre-school program to receive a free program for the children and their parents. Unfortunately, due to the budget crisis, the Parks Department

could not pay for the teachers' overtime for a Saturday training and the program had to be declined by the City of Miami. The ADL high school workshops, consisting of discussions, role playing and video presentations, emphasize the negative impact of bias and methods to be employed to reduce personal bias. Students become familiar with bias evidenced by language as well as actions, and engage in a pledge to improve the ethnic, racial and religious environment of their school, home and community. Due to a conflict with the FCAT, the workshop at Miami High was postponed until fiscal year 2009-2010 and due to the change of administration at Edison High, that workshop has had to be rescheduled. The CRB has asked the ADL to include Edison High, Jackson High and Northwestern High in its programs under the auspices of No Place for Hate. Miami High and Booker T. Washington High will also participate in this program which consists of at least three anti-bias programs in the school.

The CRB served as mediator in a dispute between community activists in the Overtown and Liberty City community and attended community meetings and marches subsequent to the Liberty City killings of teenagers.

The CRB has thus established itself as a significant and recognizable body in the community.

## **2. Is the board serving the community needs?**

Yes, the Board has worked diligently to embrace, encourage, and ensure harmonious inter-group relations among the residents of the City of Miami. CRB members are available to serve as mediators in times of community crisis. They also keep a keen eye on community issues that have the potential to escalate. The ongoing support and management of the Goodwill Ambassadors' program is facilitated by the Office of the City Manager.

## **3. Accomplishments for the year 2009:**

The Community Relations Board, in collaboration with the Office of Community Relations, has participated in numerous events, of local, national and international significance.

The CRB:

- Sponsored, with the Miami-Dade County Community Relations Board, a community summit on immigration legislation. As a result of this summit, positions were developed on the need for comprehensive immigration reform, including TPS for Haitians, a system for the granting of citizenship to undocumented immigrants in this county, the enactment of the DREAM ACT, increased security and enforcement of immigration laws, and other specific provisions to be included in new legislation. The CRB expects to work toward the enactment of this legislation in the coming months.

- Partnered with the Department of Justice Community Relations Division, in response to an altercation that occurred at Miami Edison Senior High School last spring. Miami Edison students protested in response to allegations of students being mistreated by administration of the school. The Department of Justice has a program name SPIRIT that focuses on high school students coming together to discuss problems and learn how to resolve them in a peaceful way. Members of the CRB have been trained to serve as facilitators of such program.
- Hosted a film viewing of the documentary Muhammad Ali: Made in Miami at the Wolfson campus of Miami Dade College during Black History Month. The film provided MDC students a closer look of the life of Cassius Clay who, after converting to the teaching of the Nation of Islam, became known as Muhammad Ali. The film depicted the racial tensions that were present in Miami and the controversy of his religious conversions. The presentation was followed by a discussion between MDC students and CRB members.
- Partnered in a traveling film festival with WRLN, Miami-Dade College, the International University of Art and Becoming A Man, a new program aimed at young at-risk males directed by Circuit Court Judge Peter Adrien, to present documentary films on the Freedom Tower and Muhammad Ali. Members of the CRB served as facilitators to emphasize the pride of our Cuban and African-American communities in their unique histories and contributions to our community.
- Supported the Hot Spot Campaign, which empowers residents of District 5 to anonymously report illegal activities within their communities, by distributing the Hot Spot cards in neighborhoods, joining in neighborhood publicity sessions, and attending advisory meetings.
- After the immense devastation in Haiti, CRB members helped create a non-profit organization called Haitian American Emergency Relief Committee (HAERC). The HAERC provides assistance for the people of Haiti and serves as a resource center for the collection and distribution of monies, food, medicines, and other supplies needed to assist individuals in Haiti.
- In collaboration with the University of Miami Law School volunteer organization, HOPE, and others, the CRB presented a MLK Day of Service at the Association for the Development of the Exceptional, Inc. (ADE, -focusing on the legacy of Dr. King and presenting recreational activities for the ADE clients.
- Worked with agencies and taskforces, such as HOPE, Neighbors for Neighbors and the Federal Reserve Homeownership Taskforce, in providing foreclosure prevention and information and counseling.

- Participated in the selection process for the Princeton Prize, which was awarded to a student from Miami Edison Senior High School. The Princeton Prize recognizes students who have taken a leadership role in developing and implementing a project that addresses race relations.
- As an example of partnerships leading to leveraged funding, helped established an urban garden of vegetables and fruit trees that have helped provide fresh fruit and vegetables for low income residents of Overtown. The CRB partnered with the Miami Beach Botanical Garden, which provided a consultant and the plants free of charge, and Roots in the Garden, led by Dr. Marvin Dunn. Roots in the Garden agreed to farm the land and provide regular maintenance.
- Volunteered for Arbor Day, which was a tree-planting day of service and celebration. During Arbor Day volunteers and residents came together to plant over 100 trees in the Little Haiti community to help beautify the area.
- Working with the OCR and the Goodwill Ambassadors, on January 12, 2009 the CRB was activated to monitor the Jewish Arab Candlelight Vigil for Peace held at the Torch of Friendship.
- Again working with the OCR, in February the CRB was asked to host and attend a meeting at Mt. Cavalry Missionary Church in regards to the recent shootings that had occurred in the Liberty Square area of Miami.

**4. Whether there is any other board, either public or private, which would better serve the functions of the board.**

No, the Community Relations Board is unique in many ways. It provides cohesion and fosters mutual understanding, tolerance and respect among all ethnic groups. Only the CRB has the diverse composition and commitment to address proactively the various issues of the community so as to reduce tensions and address needs which at times roil and cause dissension within our community. The board maintains a position of balance and openness between its citizenry and local government.

**5. Whether the ordinance creating the board should be amended to better enable the board to serve the purpose for which it was created.**

No, the ordinance should not be amended.

**6. Whether the board's membership requirement should be modified?**

No, the Board's membership should not be modified.

**7. The cost, both direct and indirect, of maintaining the board.**

Due to operational budgetary cuts in the last years, the CRB has performed its mission at a high level by collaborating with other community groups who shoulder most of the direct funding of our projects or engaging in activities which require many hours of volunteer work with minimal to no funds. To try to fund this unique work in our schools which is crucial to improving community relations in our community, in collaboration with the schools, the ADL and the MCCJ, the CRB is leading an effort through the City's Grants Department to identify grants and/or potential funding sources that may fund this work as well as other CRB programs and services. We will continue to strive to accomplish our goal and to maintain the programs as we have outlined them above.